



## Four Years of North African Film

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## Four Years of North African Film

*The Arab Problem is not the Black Problem.*

—EL MOUDJAHID (Algerian daily paper),  
1972

There are three countries in the Maghrib, or "the sunset," the fertile promontory that juts further north into the Mediterranean than any other part of Africa—Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—and they all make movies, although with widely varying frequency and under widely varying financial situations. And although they are all influenced by the Arabic culture that has spread itself over North and most of Central Africa since the year 647, they all have something more in common—failure. Why? They are not all bad films, even from a classical point of view.

A second wave of Arabs roared across North Africa, escaping a probably economically caused *coup d'état* in Damascus in 750; they ended up in Spain until another, Spanish economic revolution, better known as the Inquisition, forced them and their compatriots the Berbers from North Africa back to North Africa. The last Arab city-state in Spain fell in 1492—the year that Columbus, or his associates, started to spread Catholicism all over the Americas. 1492 was one of the worst of all possible years for the Third World.

And while it may be small compensation, it is perhaps also thus that there is a strong influence of Luis Buñuel in Moroccan film. Sadism mixed with beautiful images, animals dead and alive and sometimes with symbolic meaning—both are in Hamid Benani's 1970 *Wechma* (*Markings*), one of the two Moroccan films we will spend some time with. The title is supposedly a reference to the tattoos that Berber and Arab women place on their foreheads,

hands, and ankles but ironically is a reference to the marks left by ill treatment on the hero as he grows up. He is an orphan, he burns a young owl, he plays with his stepfather's gun, his stepfather brands his hand with a hot iron bar forever. Near the end of the film another lad is tied up and beaten with a dead snake. Benani assures me that several incidents in his film are inspired by Berber superstitions, as opposed to Islamic religious beliefs—but if so they are quite different from Berber superstitions in Algeria. In truth, Benani saw and was impressed with Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* while he was studying at IDHEC in Paris. If you think that Benani has stolen something from Buñuel, I would rather suggest that he has found a common bond in Buñuel—a common fund of emotion and fear somewhere in the subsoil near the Straits of Gibraltar. Morocco is almost Spain and the Flamenco may or may not be older than North African Andalusian music. Nobody knows.

The influence of Buñuel is developed to an even higher degree in Ben Barka Souhel's 1972 *Alf Yid wa Yid* (*A Thousand and One Hands*). Now in color, chameleons change, snakes are stoned to death, people ride donkeys in the desert and monkeys find themselves on chains. People are overworked, they fall down stairs, break their backs and kill one another—all in images of almost unsurpassed beauty. Women card wool, men dye it and carry it into the sun and Mimsy Farmer, cocktail glass in hand, fills us in on the cultural background of the rich and expensive Berber rugs which come from this never-ending process. *Alf Wid wa Yid* is *mi-chemin* between Jorge Sanjines's *Blood of the Condor*—a young worker, unable to obtain medical aid for his father, who was injured while working, kills the wife of his boss—and a docu-

mentary on rug-making. Actually, beyond the Buñuel influence, Barka seems to have invented a new style of film—the false documentary. There is no dialogue for a rather unbearable length of time (and what there is is badly dubbed into French, the final print having been made in Italy). Each shot in the beginning of the film could be from a nicely photographed documentary—but for this silence and the fact that each shot lasts a little too long. A green door opens, a donkey enters with bags of wool on its back, tattooed women in bright Berber dresses card the wool, a man takes the wool onto the roof of the building where they are working. Then the actions are repeated.

I wish to switch back to *Wechma* here to clarify the reason for this repetition. In *Wechma* the hero, when he grows up (we do not see his adolescence), goes to work in a carnival riding a motorcycle around the inside of a large barrel. The central image of the film occurs at this point: the hero rides the motorcycle around and around inside the barrel, stabilizing himself by centrifugal force, and the camera stares down into the barrel for what is again an almost unbearable length of time. This is in a way the problem of Morocco—how can a disinherited people find peace by centrifugal force? Belong-

This article is the second in a series by Lyle Pearson, who has spent much of his time in North Africa and Paris in recent years. The first article, "Four Years of African Film," appeared in *FQ*, Spring 1973, and dealt with sub-Saharan films. The third will deal with films from Egypt and adjacent areas.

ing neither to the East nor the West, Morocco remains a much more heavily Arabized country than Algeria or Tunisia and yet the roots of much of its richness—Spain—have been cut off.

Thus the repeated action in *Alf Yid wa Yid* begins to take on not only a daily but a circular pattern; but Barka is as much against European-

ization as he is against exploitation by his own kind. One of the great moments in his film comes when Miss Farmer drops an ice cube into a whiskey glass accompanied by the Eurovision station-break music. You can hear jet planes on the sound track and when you hear jets in Morocco they usually belong to an American air base. I asked Barka if his film was anti-American and he answered "Not particularly." I said Mimsy Farmer seems to be only a symbol when she is killed; she is not the patron but only his wife. I asked, not wanting to mention specifically the King of Morocco upon whose life an assassination attempt is made about once a year, "Where is the patron?" "Everywhere," said Barka, "everywhere."

Both *Wechma* and *Alf Yid wa Yid* are excellent films but they don't present any answers—no more than does Buñuel; the Spanish revolution, after all, was a failure and there is no reason to assume that one in Morocco would be more successful. These films aren't getting any answers either, in spite of having been shown in several film festivals and having won several awards. *Wechma* for example has shown in at least five festivals, has won a major French award, and second prize at Carthage in 1970, and has never been distributed in France (it failed in Morocco). It is perhaps too early to know what will happen to *Alf Yid wa Yid*; it is dubbed badly, but it did win the Ouagadougou festival this year. All it needs is for somebody to buy it.

These are not the only two Moroccan films that exist but they are Morocco's only two independent productions and its only feature films since a series of government-sponsored films ended in 1969. The government-sponsored films often suffered from bad material and low budgets; *Wechma* and *Alf Yid wa Yid* suffer only from a lack of interest outside the country.

Spain and 1492—that's why there aren't any Moroccans in South America and why there is no interest in Arabs in either of the Americas.

The problem of film in Algeria, where the ex-

Spanish Arabs never returned, is quite different. Here we have an emancipated country\* in full use of its oil reserves, a country reaching toward socialism, where land is being redistributed to small farmers—and where the movies are terrible. Hannes Kamphausen in “Cinema in Africa: A Survey” (*Cineaste*, Summer 1972) says that after Algeria nationalized its theaters it lived off its film reserves until European distributors finally “gave in” but that’s not exactly true. French bombs are still *refilé* on Algeria as quickly as they fail in France and in spite of Frederick Gronich’s trip here awhile back for “business” only one American film has opened in almost a year (four more are scheduled to open soon). In Morocco, where the cinemas are not nationalized, Cannes festival winners open, at least in the big cities, soon after they do anywhere else. The same is true in Tunisia, which has several specialized *art et essai* cinemas.

More important, there are fewer Oriental films in Algeria than in Tunisia and certainly fewer than in Morocco, particularly Egyptian films. William Walling in “To Give Them New Faces” (*Africa Report*, June 1971) says this is because Egyptian Arabic is difficult for Algerians to understand. Granted that classical Arabic is difficult for them to understand, this statement is still not true; most of the imported programs on Algerian television if they are not from the United States are from Egypt and Lebanon and are presented without subtitles. Oriental films on the contrary are shown in theaters with French subtitles. American TV programs (*Green Acres*, *Perry Mason*, *The Great Adventure*) are dubbed into French. The truth is simply that Algeria doesn’t buy films except when it has to, and then usually the least expensive it can find.

The only thing that saves filmgoing in Algeria

is the Cinémathèque, which has access to all of the films that remain in Algeria, runs special programs through embassies, occasionally buys an Arab or African film, preserves others donated to it, and presents five films a day (there is no Cinémathèque in Morocco and there has been one in Tunisia only since October 1972). With the situation of commercial cinema in Algeria being so bad—French duds, Italian westerns, an occasional Russian film—the Algerian Cinémathèque wants to expand as much as it can and although it can never replace the commercial circuit at least four small Cinémathèques now exist outside the capital.

Whatever Algerian film people think of Ouagadougou (according to *El Moudjahid* they don’t like it and would like to take it into their own hands), this doesn’t explain the extensive lack of Algerian films that has been keeping me out of Algerian cinemas since I first came here in 1971. Only one Algerian feature has opened in two years (they used to open at a frequency of two a year), there hasn’t been a new newsreel in six months (Tunisia and Morocco make one a week) and unseen and failed films are stockpiling everywhere. If the Algerian government doesn’t like the way a film turns out—if it doesn’t follow its socialistic-Islamic policies or is very bad technically—it simply doesn’t open. One of my best friends is still sitting over a glass of wine at *Contrescarpe* in Paris waiting for money to make thirty copies of his film so he can come home again. He made a comedy called *Visages de l’Algérie 1972* (*Faces of Algeria 1972*), but its already May 1973. He’ll never come home.

The film that has opened is Mohammed Bouamari’s *El Faham* (*The Charcoal Man*), a sort of blues comedy that received a second prize at Carthage in 1972. But *El Faham* is not the first nor the best Algerian comedy, and it’s badly made; people at Carthage felt sorry for it because the Algerian government was trying to stop it from being shown (and there may be some parts cut), and because it is “the first Algerian film to criticize the present Algerian government.” It shows a charcoal maker eking out a living, whose

\*Emancipated from the Spanish, the Turks and the French—but not necessarily from the Arabs. “Algeria is not an Arabic country but a Berber Country Arabized to a greater or lesser degree.” —Ahmed Taleb, Algerian Minister of Culture, *Berber Institute Bulletin*, Paris, September 1972.

Mohammed  
Zinet's  
VISAGES  
de  
l'Algérie



profession no longer is practicable because of advancements made in packaging natural gas, and whose wife secretly goes to work in a woolen mill shaking off the family restrictions (veil, winding sheet) that have kept North African women from being themselves since the last Arab invasion in about 973.<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of the film the charcoal man enters a government office and asks a friend with whom he fought during Algeria's war for independence if he might be able to find him a new job. "I'll see," says the ex-friend, and we last see him talking on a telephone but through a glass partition and we are unable to hear what he is saying. The idea according to Bouamari is that the ex-friend may be asking about a job—or he may be calling his mistress.

This I don't think is very strong criticism of present Algerian government policies and yet to

accept it one has to accept that the Algerian revolution, at least concerning its citizens, has been a failure. Whether or not the Algerian "revolution" (the Algerians call it a revolution; the French call it a war) has been a success or not is not directly what I'm writing about.\* The subject, rather is whether Algerian film has been a success and the answer is No. You're not getting any Cuban films in the US because of the continued blockade against all business with Cuba but there is no such blockade against Algeria. The reason you're not getting any Algerian films, even the old ones, in the US is (1) these movies aren't very good, and/or (2) nobody cares about Algerians.†

There is one Algerian film that I like very much—a comedy called *Hassan Terro* (*Hassan the Terrorist*). I'm sorry to stick with the comedies but they're such a relief after Ahmed

\*For that see any number of volumes by American sociologists, including William B. Quandt's *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria, 1954-1968*, MIT Press, 1968, possibly the best of the lot.

†There may be a connection between Algerian culture in general and the quality of these films. When the Prophet Mohammed entered the Kaaba in 629 (our calendar) his first job was to smash all of the images

the generations before him had created. Salah Stetie in "Islam and the Image," Georges Sadoul, ed., *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, Beyrouth (UNESCO) 1966, p. 22, discusses this point and finally admits cinema as a possible Moslem art because it is only, as tradition allows, a shadow play. Traditional Berber art is no more pictorial than that of the Arabs, consisting mostly of abstract patterns on cloth, leather and wood.

Rachedi's *Pour que vive Algérie* (*That Algeria May Live*) and the FLN's (National Liberation Front's) *Les Bonnes Familles* (*The Good Families*).

*Hassan Terro*, in its story, is unlike any other film I know. I could make one up and call it *Dagwood Bumstead Goes to War*, but *Hassan Terro* is a dialogue comedy. A superficial comparison, however, could be made between *Hassan Terro* and the Cuban comedy *The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin*. *Hassan Terro* is, again, a dialogue comedy and lacks all of the visual tricks of *Juan Quin Quin*. In addition *Hassan Terro* unlike *Juan Quin Quin* is a send-up not of revolution but of revolutionaries. It holds the box-office record in Algiers (with *Soul to Soul* and *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*) and yet it was not included in the two-week retrospective of Algerian films recently held at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris. It is the second film by Mohamed Lakhdar Hamina, who made *Le Vent des Aurès* (*The Wind from the Aures Mountains*), and yet it is damned by Algerians and Roumis (an Arabic and Berber word for Europeans) alike. Younés Dadci, in *Dialogues Algérie-Cinéma*,<sup>2</sup> refers to it as "Lakhdar Hamina's second bomb," and Walling writes that it "failed to live up to the expectations aroused by his first full-length feature." Guy Hennebelle has no better words for it, although his are in French.<sup>3</sup>

I figured a movie with notices like these must be pretty good; besides, whenever I mess up while playing football with the kids in the street they all look at me and yell "Hassan Terro!" I finally found that it was making a week-only reappearance (it was produced in 1968) in a little theater below the Casbah in the Bab El Oued (River Gate) district in Algiers—which has since closed. I didn't like it the first time I saw it and so I talked about it with one of my students\* and went back to see it again.

\*A private student. Walling was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Algiers but I have a blind spot against such positions and I think they do against me. When in Algeria I teach English in and around the Casbah for from one to three dollars an hour.

There is nothing like *Hassan Terro*. It has no style; after the failure of Lakhdar Hamina's slick, imported neorealism in *Le Vent des Aurès*, he was wise enough to give this story of a non-revolutionary, or rather of a revolutionary by sheer accident, what it needs—nothing. Except for two short sequences, one of them again neorealism and the other a dream sequence, *Hassan Terro* doesn't fit into the auteur theory of film—as well it shouldn't. It's based on a stage farce by one Rouiched, who stars in the film (and in several other Algerian films). Rouiched is a popular theatrical, movie, and television comedian and this is the only film for which he has written his own material.\* All Lakhdar Hamina did was to give an attentive eye to Rouiched's proceedings, and Rouiched is a very funny man. Totally bourgeois, with a bad painting on felt of the sacred Kaaba on his living room wall and lace curtains at the windows, Hassan is the sort of Algerian with everything to lose who whistles *La Marseillaise* when French soldiers march by. If he steals a bottle of milk, Koranic verses on theft emanating from a radio follow him all the way home. But there is a revolution going on and Hassan is too chicken even to keep his neighborhood revolutionaries from hiding in his basement. When the French police enter his home and ask why he is home at three in the afternoon he says "I'm sick," and when they ask him why is the whole family at home he answers "We're all sick." Later Hassan dreams he is cut down by a French guillotine.

False rendezvous in cafés, leads given to the police that amount to nothing (Hassan is always

\**Rien Ne Va Plus* (No More Bets), a film "adapted and directed" by Mustapha Kateb from material by Rouiched (listed in "Images du Cinéma Algérien," *Cinéma 72*, No. 171, December 1972) is still unfinished and does not feature Rouiched. While this might not be the place to smash the auteur theory, it can be quickly noted that not only have most of the old new directors in France dried up, all of their performers short of Bernadette Lafont have directed their first films in the last two years. We may find an *acteur* theory of cinema just around the French translation gap.

incapable of picking out the guilty person in a line-up) and his general sense of fear convince the French that he *must* be up to something, so headlines appear saying that the French have captured an important terrorist and only the voice of his wife, who belongs to the FLN, returning to Hassan after he is given truth serum, keeps him from revealing the whereabouts of the revolutionaries he knows. The end of the film is peculiar; after the French soldiers leave the office where Hassan has been given the truth serum the camera swings from him to a Venetian-blind-covered window through which we can see the skyline of Algiers. The Venetian blind is there because it is a very fakey view of Algiers and the view is there I think to say, if only through acts like these of Hassan and/or his wife, Algiers will be okay.

Hassan Terro is a sort of man in a pinball machine who simply gets banged around by enough flippers that he finally ends up in the winner's hole, which happens to be marked "Revolution"—and as such should be a lesson to us all. That is, Algerians aren't always as aggressive as they are made out to be, and nobody is particularly pushing Algeria these days. Power is difficult to balance in Algeria because of all the tribal conflicts—Arabs versus Berbers, sedentarys versus nomads, merchants versus socialists,<sup>4</sup> and Algeria suffers from a military dictatorship placed in power two and a half years after it gained its independence, which stifles many things and makes every sort of private business an improbability. Casbah Films, for instance, the Algerian arm that was responsible for the sensitive co-production *The Battle of Algiers*, is out of business as anything but an equipment rental firm.

There are four government branches engaged in film activities—*Actualités Algériennes* (news-reels), the Cinémathèque, RTA (radio-television) and the ONCIC which is responsible for buying and making feature and short films—but only the Cinémathèque and RTA are doing anything. However, two highly touted and long-awaited features have been finished recently. They are *Décembre* (*December*) which, while

finished last July, just opened for the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (April 15, 1973), in which Lakhdar Hamina forgets the simplicity he learned in *Hassan Terro*, and Mohammed Slim Riad's *Sa Naoud* (*We Shall Return*) which has not opened because of "technical faults."\* Part of *Sa Naoud* was filmed in occupied Palestine and part of it in the Sahara; the sewing together of the two may be where the faults occur. And almost a dozen documentaries have been made on the "Agricultural Revolution." These include five television films made by RTA and *Actualités Algériennes' La Revolution Agrarienne*. These six films, with Youssef Chahine's Egyptian feature *El Ard* (*The Earth*) and Nelson Dos Santos's *Vidas Secas*, are being shown to the fellahs (farm laborers) in the south through a system of traveling ciné-buses. But the five directors, in a recent newspaper interview, complained about the meager equipment they were forced to use and the fact that RTA had actually held them up from making the films that they wanted to make for many years. In addition, ten years after a war for independence seems a long time before carrying out a land redistribution program.

We need *Hassan Terro*.

I know of no better—indeed no other—article in English on Algerian films than Walling's and my other comments on it are fairly minor. Walling is not sure what happened to Ahmed Rachedi, who has recently been released as the head of ONCIC, between his 1965 documentary *L'Aube des Damnés* (*The Morning of the Damned*) and his 1970 *L'Opium et Le Bâton* (*The Opium and the Rod*). What happened was that Rachedi was assistant producer on

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\*It is too early to know what will happen to *Décembre*, but it exemplifies all the problems of Algerian film: military, sentimental, awkward, and pretentious, it speaks only of yesterday and is half French. According to *Algérie-Actualité* (a weekly news-magazine), April 15, 1973, "... the poor Algerian peasant remains a bit-player in the national cinema." Refused by the Venice festival, *Décembre* won a second place award at Ouagadougou this year.

Costa Gavras's *Z* and badly learned all the tricks of big-picture-making. Also, Walling does not mention an Algerian feature, *Les-Hors-la-lois* (*The Outlaws*) fathered by Lakhdar Hamina but signed by Tewfig Farès, who wrote the screenplay for *Le Vent des Aurès*. *Les-Hors-la-lois* is an imitation of a western, which is not a bad idea in Algeria with its glowing Sahara—and after all, Arabs in the East did invent the western in classic works of literature like *The Saga of Antar*. But because there are relatively few American westerns in Algeria *Les-Hors-la-lois* turns out to be a good imitation of a bad Italian western, with lapses into low French comedy and a French pop sound track. *Les-Hors-la-lois* isn't a very good film but it is an omission in the period Walling has covered; *El Faham* and *Décembre* are the only Algerian feature films to reach the public since then and *El Faham* failed. I question nothing else in Walling's article except that his list is one of minor films. Whatever caused the flash of Cuban cinema at least until 1970, its crazy concepts and new techniques, Algerian cinema didn't get it.

Algeria, after all, did not choose to be part of the Third World, although it has chosen to keep its rhetoric whirling as fast as it can. And it is its tight, let's-build-on-oil-and-nothing-else economic policy that keeps movies (and life) from moving forward in one of the most rhetoric-ridden countries in the world. Let's sell the oil—to Hell, one might say, with New Faces.

One can see now I think that the Black Problem is not the Arab Problem, at least not as far as film-making goes: you can work in 35mm in North Africa without the feeling that you're selling out, at least not to Europe—even if your color film has to be developed and your subtitles made there. The exception that proves this Maghribi rule is Tunisia.

Tunisia wants to make feature films and as host to the biggest film festival in Africa for the past eight years, it seems as if it should be able to. But Tunisia is a small country ("A little like Switzerland," says Frederick Gronich<sup>5</sup>)

with a population of five million (compared to 13 million in Algeria and 15 million in Morocco), with few natural resources and depending on hand-produced merchandise and tourism and gifts from the United Nations and friendly European neighbors to withstand poverty, the militant Arabism of Libya, and the socialistic Islam of Algeria. Any Tunisian feature film is going to have to be a success outside of Tunisia to pay for itself and so far none has. Tunisian features tend to be color coproductions that appear to have more of a European hand in them than they sometimes do (a larger percentage of Tunisians speak English than Algerians or Moroccans because of a better developed language system in the schools, and many Tunisian film people train in Canada; Algerians tend to train in Eastern socialist countries and Moroccans in France) or black-and-white, small dramas dealing with futility, the displaced peasant in the city, unaccountable death, family disputes and, yes, prostitution. Two of these black-and-white productions I like very much, Hamouda Ben Halima's *Khelifa Lagraa* (*Khelifa the Scurvy*) and Sadok Aicha's *Mokhtar* (*The Chosen One*).

*Khelifa Lagraa* is the story of an adolescent who insults his neighborhood imam (prayer leader), loses his hair because of a scalp disease, gets drunk, and eventually goes to bed with his married aunt. The film unfortunately is marred technically; one of its reels was destroyed in the laboratory and so one of the central events in the film, a joyful conversation between Khelifa and a young girl, is represented only by a series of still photographs. *Khelifa* has never been distributed in Tunisia, never as far as I know has been shown outside of Africa probably because of its technical faults, and Tunisians don't like it: to them it is a film of "eating"—too "quotidian"—and its point is certainly that nothing much but adolescence is happening in Tunisia.

*Mokhtar* was made a year earlier (1968). It is also humorous, if ultimately more depressing, is almost as inexpensively made (*Khelifa* was made in 16mm) and has a style unlike any film



I know. An anti-film, or a film testing the possibility of making a film, open to spontaneous comment as to that possibility, *Mokhtar* ends with the death of its film-maker hero. People sit in cafés and ignore police sirens, drive their cars no matter where and get out and look at the camera; famous Tunisian personalities are interviewed (in apparently what are improvised if not genuine interviews) as to whether or not they will put money into the hero's planned film (they generally give a begrudging Yes). All of this is photographed with a slightly off-center grey-grey dullness that suggests Aicha is more pessimistic than any of his characters about the making of a successful Tunisian film. He seems to be right—he has directed nothing since and *Mokhtar* remains one of the best of Tunisia's fourteen features.

The short film however is really more exciting in Tunisia than the impossible feature; while Tahar Cheriaa and the Carthage festival bang the drums for big African, Arab, and Technicolor features a series of ciné-clubs is growing all over the country and some students are making clandestine shorts—which the government confiscates whenever it can get its hands on them. Thus, after a film on the president of the country (who is usually referred to as a benevolent dictator) and one on Palestine were pulled, a scheduled afternoon of amateur cinema at Carthage did not take place. The government locked up these "free" films (the film-makers paid for none of the equipment nor film stock) and so we didn't see them—but two other banned 16mm short films still received several showings, partly because the jury included them in the lump sum of five short award winners.

Taieb Louhichi's *Mon Village, Un Village Parmi Tant d'Autres . . .* (*My Village, A Village Among So Many Others . . .*) is a sad account of Tunisian agriculture: with poor soil, no chance of international sales, and no government support, Tunisian farms are according to the film being deserted for the cities—as we see also in the feature *Et Demain . . . Mon Village* is a simple documentary narrated by its young director and finished by him at labora-

tories in Paris. It's not going to be shown much in Tunisia, and its chances of success in countries that aren't directly concerned with Tunisia are very small. It's a devastating account for anyone who cares, but it's probably going to find its greatest audience among film societies in Europe.

The other banned short at Carthage was enough to justify any festival, and has some passages that are worthy of comparison to the most ethereal sequences in *Zéro de Conduite*. Ridha Behi's *Les Seuils Interdits* (*Forbidden Portals*) is the story of a young, sexually frustrated postcard salesman who becomes infatuated with a German tourist. He finds, in what is barely a fantasy sequence, a park in which young tourists are making love with a "No Trespassing—for Tourists Only" sign on it. He buys a copy of *Lui* (the French equivalent of *Playboy*, available in Morocco and Tunisia but banned in Algeria), takes it home and has his fun with it. When he meets the German tourist, there is a beautiful fantasy sequence in which he and she join hands and in slow motion glide through the lobby of her expensive, European-style hotel. In her hotel room, in continued slow motion, he sits on her bed and she, totally naked, glides onto the bed next to him. Cut. The next morning, now out of control of his fantasies, the young man follows the girl to the mosque of Kairouan, which is the most sacred mosque in North Africa, climbs the minaret (tower) after her, and rapes her. In a final scene he is condemned to prison by a court judge. I asked two Egyptians about this film and they said Yes, it happens. I said I would have preferred a final scene in which we see the young man walking away into a crowd of humanity and they said No, this is an extreme case—that is, sexual frustration exists in North Africa, although it doesn't often get as out of control as this.

Whether it is Islam or repressive governments—or a traditional sense of personal subjugation to tribal and family customs that existed in North Africa before the Arabs came—that cause such films as all of these, I feel will be easier to explain in the third article of this series, which

will deal with where Islam came from. Islam is still in its mediaeval period, its fourteenth century, and can only thus sit in conflict with an older, Christian world which has changed greatly, for better or worse, and which has learned to exploit whatever it doesn't like since its own fourteenth century. The fact that occidental movies can be seen in Tunisia may be responsible for such a film as *Les Seuls Interdits*. This I think will be easier to explain in dealing directly with the Near East. More on that and on film in the Near East in the next instalment.

Algiers, April 1973

#### NOTES

1. See Gordon, David C., *Women of Algeria: An Essay on Change*, Harvard Middle East Monographs, Cambridge, Mass., 1968. But Gordon's message seems to be to Think French and he writes as if Algeria's war for independence was not inevitable.
2. Copedith, Paris, n.d.
3. "Afrique: Petite Planète du Cinéma," *Cinema '70*, January 1970.
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